

Letters to the Editor: How or to Whom Do We Communicate LCA Results?

Comments to the Editorial in Int. J. LCA 5 (3) 125 (2000) by Patrick Hofstetter

I am glad to read this latest editorial¹ and applaud the general direction suggested. While the editorial mostly discussed how to present LCA results it paid little attention to the question of *if* they should be published and, if so, for whom. First of all we have to recognize that it is not *a priori* clear that LCA results should be published in journals at all. For instance, there is not a journal that publishes all applications of Monte Carlo Analysis and the Journal 'Environmental Impact Assessment Review' is also not the place where all the Environmental Impact Statements are published. Of course, I am aware that the purpose of LCA is different from Monte Carlo Analysis or EIA and that the dissemination of LCA results may be more important than for other tools. I believe that the (real world) application of different LCA methods and the experiences with LCA in decision support is a necessary and valuable feedback for the development of improved methods. The limited accessibility of case studies that are published in the gray literature does not provide this feedback. As a contribution to the discussion started in the editorial, I would like to add two proposals on how to proceed:

1. Authors of case studies should be motivated to submit their articles to scientific journals dealing with the case study subject. This would also guarantee that the studied alternatives are relevant and that experts in the field agree with the technology parameters. The authors may consider selecting journals that are in the Science Citation Index in order to facilitate searches for LCA studies from different fields.
2. The present Int. J. LCA could split into an 'International Newsletter for Life Cycle Assessment' (Int. N. LCA) plus

an Int. J. LCA. Subscription would always include both publications and therefore subsidize each other. While the Int. N. LCA would be sent out bi-monthly, include information on venues, debates, and short announcements for LCA studies that are made available on the internet; the Int. J. LCA would publish peer-reviewed articles that advance the science of LCA. The frequency of its publication would solely depend on the available number of peer-reviewed articles. While the format requirements for the Int. N. LCA would be minimal, the Int. J. LCA would become a journal that enters the Science Citation Index and needs therefore also careful editing.

This second proposal combines the two proposals of Klöpffer and Heinrich but increases at the same time the value for researchers to publish in the Int. J. LCA.

Finally, I disagree with the editors' interpretation of the new ISO standards. The public acceptability of case studies has certainly little to do with their compliance with ISO standards. ISO is not a democratic institution but its standards aim to make our life easier and more efficient. I did not research the date when the metric screw-thread was standardized by ISO but in my life I have had to deal a lot with non-metric screws – and the public accepts it. Although I agree that reviewers need to check the ISO-compatibility if authors claim to be compliant, I strongly disagree that the ISO-compatibility of LCA studies is an issue beyond these claims.

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Comments to the Editorial in Int. J. LCA 5 (3) 125 (2000) by Rolf Frischknecht

In regard to the question put to me concerning the specific weighting of either contributions on 'methodology' or on 'case studies': Particularly the purpose and the target public of case studies are unclear to me. 1. The case studies published up to now in the journal are not able to replace full studies conforming to the ISO standards as there is no room for presenting everything which is necessary. 2. Individuals active in LCA have little interest in the results of a specific product or service; for example, concerning those findings which deal with the LCA of a battery housing, interested parties are more likely, for instance, companies in the manufacturing of batteries.

In my opinion, methodological new developments (supported using case studies) and discussions concerned with the quality of published data in life cycle inventories (which may be either fully transparent or otherwise) represent that kind of information which is of special interest here.

The first issue of the year 2000 contains two articles on methodology. Everything else involves valuable information for LCA-users and researchers. The Int. J. LCA must earn a good reputation and rating when articles of superior quality on methodology are seen to appear. Otherwise, the researchers will feel compelled to turn to other journals.

Accordingly, the Int. J. LCA could also appear in two parts: A 'more rapid' part for News and Discussions, and a 'slower' part for the scientific and reviewed articles. The slower part could appear twice a year, for example, while the more rapid part, as to date, could appear six times yearly. Should more reviewed articles be available, however, the cadence of the ('slower') scientific section could be increased as well – provided the subscribers may agree to an increase of the subscription rate which would then be necessary.

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¹ Klöpffer W., Heinrich A.B., How to Communicate LCA Results, Editorial in Int. J. LCA 5 (3) 125 (2000)